

Brief History of the Ninetieth Division

(Continued from last issue)

Relief by 7th Division and Move to the Meuse.

Early in October the division was relieved by the 7th Division, the relief being completed on the 10th of October. The division was concentrated for a few days in billets in the vicinity of Toul and was then moved by truck to the Blercourt area, about 20 kilometers from Verdun. Here the division was billeted for a few days in huts and barracks in the woods and was then moved forward from the billeting area into bivouacs in the vicinity of Montfaucon, Cussy, Nanville, Septsarges and as a part of the 3rd Corps.

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Commencing with the counter-offensive in July which cleared the Marne salient, the Allied Armies, particularly the British Army, had steadily driven the enemy back until nearly all of the ground gained in his great offensive in March, April, and May, 1918, had been recovered. It became evident that the enemy was planning, if not already executing, a general retreat with the Meuse as his pivot, and that if the Allied Armies could continue their offensive, and particularly if they could break the enemy's pivot on the Meuse, a decision might be reached. With this in view the great attack of September 26, which developed into the battle of the Meuse-Argonne, was planned and the First American Army was given the honor position on the Meuse with the important task of breaking the pivot of the enemy's retreat. The part which the 90th Division played on September 26 has already been described. The first attack met with great success on the entire front of the Army. The advance was rapid. Then as divisions became exhausted, communications and supply became extremely difficult and the enemy threw in great numbers of reserve divisions, the advance slowed down and the first stage of the battle was concluded. During the second stage there was continual fighting along the line but no concerted attack was launched by the entire army. The effort was rather on the part of the

individual divisions and corps, to straighten out the line and reach a position from which a second great attack could be launched.

Relief of 5th Division; Capture of Bantheville.

The 90th Division went into the line near the end of this second period. The 179th Brigade relieved the 10th Brigade of the 5th Division on the night of October 21-22. The 180th Brigade was held in division reserve. The 3rd Division was on the right and the 89th Division on the left. At this time the front line ran from just north of Romagne and Cuneil around the northwestern edge of the Bois des Rappes. The 89th Division had pushed forward and occupied the Bois de Bantheville on the left, so that the line of the 90th Division formed a pocket a little over two kilometers in depth in the front of the Corps. In this pocket there were the villages of Bantheville and Bourrut. The first mission of the division was to straighten out the line. The 357th Infantry attacked at 3 o'clock in the afternoon of October 23, captured Bantheville and the high ground north and northwest of that town and established a line from the northeast corner of the Bois des Rappes over the high ground north of Bourrut to the northeastern corner of the Bois de Bantheville, where the line joined with the 89th Division. The 357th Infantry, in the Bois des Rappes at the same time extended its left to connect with the 357th Infantry north of Bourrut, and the same night two companies of the 357th Infantry crossed the Andon Brook and established a line from a point about 500 meters southwest of Aincerville along the Aincerville-Bantheville road to the line held by the 357th Infantry. This extremely successful operation, upon which the division was highly complimented by the Army and Corps Commanders, resulted in giving the division an excellent position from which it could jump off in case of a great attack. This advance position was held until November 1, despite many counter attacks and continuous intense shelling.

Attack of November 1.

With the capture of Bantheville by the 179th Brigade, everything was in readiness for the great attack by the First American Army and the French Armies on its left, by which it was hoped to finally break the enemy's last line of resistance and change his retreat into a rout. This attack was ordered for November 1. On the night of October 30th the 180th Brigade was relieved by the 179th Brigade which had suffered heavy casualties during its eight days in line and was withdrawn into division reserve. The 180th Brigade went into line and attacked with the 360th Infantry on the left and the 359th Infantry on the right. The 345th Machine Gun Battalion and the 343rd Machine Gun Battalion were in position on the front line from which they could cover the advance with overhead fire. On the morning of the 1st these companies fired more than 1,200,000 rounds and contributed largely to the very great success of the attack.

The plan of the attack was that the 360th Infantry on the left, on a narrow front, and assisted by a concentration of all available artillery, should drive forward through the Carre Farm and the immensely strong wooded position on the left of the sector up to and beyond Andevanne. With this attack a success the 359th Infantry on the right would be able to advance across the open ground west of Aincerville without disastrous losses. An extremely heavy artillery preparation opened at 3:30 a. m., and on the 1st of November and at 5:20 a. m. the infantry went over the top. From the outset the fighting was desperate. The best veteran troops available in the German Army were thrown in to stop the advance of the division. Machine gun nests were everywhere, the gunners sticking to their guns until wiped out. The 360th and 359th Infantry, splendidly supported by the 155th Field Artillery Brigade (89th Division), advanced practically without halt. Grand Carre Farm was taken and mopped up. The woods to the north were cleaned out, Andevanne and Cote 243 captured and the line pushed a kilometer beyond by the 360th. Chassagne Farm and St. Marguerite Farm were captured by the 359th Infantry and by late afternoon our troops were on or beyond their objectives. The Freya Stellung, the last known enemy position, was definitely and completely broken.

On the 2nd of November the advance was continued against desperate resistance. Villers-devil, Dun was taken and passed, Hill 321 was occupied, and the Bois de Raux was put within our lines before night. On the right the 359th Infantry advanced more than three kilometers, and one battalion, extending over into the sector of the 5th Division on the right, advanced through the "Punch Bowl" all the way to the Meuse.

On the 3rd of November the 179th Brigade passed through the 180th Brigade and at 8 o'clock attacked with the 357th Infantry on the left and the 357th Infantry on the right. It was evident after a few hours that the attacks of the preceding days had broken the enemy's resistance and that he was completely disorganized. By night the brigade had penetrated the dense woods of the Bois de Taillay and occupied the towns of Montigny, Saulmaury, Sassy and Mont-devil, Sassy.

On the 4th and 5th of November the exploitation was continued and the hold on the river towns was strengthened. Hales, Wiseppe and Lanuville were occupied.

The divisions on the left of the 90th were meeting with equal success and were driving the enemy back to the Meuse River. With the breaking of the Freya Stellung by the 90th Division, the vitally important railroad from Sedan to Montmedy was brought under our artillery fire and the enemy's hold on the river was broken. The 5th Division on our right succeeded in crossing the Meuse at Dun-sur-Meuse and was forcing the enemy back on the right bank of the river. It was evident that the enemy's retreat was becoming completely disorganized and if our pressure could continue he would break.

On the 11th of November the 179th Brigade crossed the Meuse at Sassy and by all night marching occupied Montmedy on the right bank of the river. The next day the 358th Infantry captured Blanc Fontaine and after desperate fighting secured a foothold in Stenay. At the same time the 357th Infantry on the right had advanced over rolling country swept by machine gun and artillery fire and reached the heights overlooking Baillon and later occupied the town. On this day the enemy threw into line against the 90th his last reserve division on the western front.

The 90th Division on our left had in the meantime, forced a crossing of the river at Pouilly and was ordered to send troops to protect the left flank of the 90th Division north of Stenay. When these troops were in position it was planned to pass the 180th Brigade again through the lines of the 179th Brigade and to continue the attack in the direction of Montmedy.

The Armistice.

Early in the morning of November 11, word was received that the great battle in which American troops had ever been engaged was ended by Germany's acceptance of the Allied terms, and thus hostilities would cease at 11 o'clock. Before that hour patrols from the 358th Infantry forced their way into Stenay and completely occupied the town, the enemy having evacuated after the desperate fighting of the previous day.

From the armistice until the di-

vision started its march into Germany, the only activity was patrolling along the old front line to collect returned prisoners of war and civilians and to locate and guard abandoned and surrendered material of war.

Shortly after the conclusion of the armistice Major General Henry T. Allen left the division to take command of the 8th Corps. Command passed to Brigadier General J. P. O'Neil, who continued in command during the march into Germany and until December 30, when Major General C. H. Martin assumed command.

March to Germany.

On the 23rd of November the 90th Division, having been designated as one of the nine divisions of the Army of Occupation (of which only one other, the 89th, was a National Army division), moved forward toward Montmedy. The division marched from Stenay across Luxembourg to French Prussia, where, as part of the 7th Corps, it shortly before Christmas settled into winter quarters along the Moselle River in the vicinity of Berncastel, Germany, occupying the Krieses of Dann, Wittlich and Berncastel. Here it was joined by the 165th Artillery Brigade.

Summary.

The average advance made by the division in the St. Mihiel operation was six kilometers, in the Meuse-Argonne 22 kilometers. The division was under fire from August 29 to November 11, with the exception of seven days occupied in changing sectors; seventy-five days without a relief. During this time it went over the top in two major offensives and seven minor operations and was still advancing when halted by the armistice.

The division captured 42 pieces of artillery, 36 trench mortars, 294 machine guns, 903 rifles and immense quantities of ammunition and stores. It took as prisoners 32 officers and 1844 men. Casualties amounted to 37 officers and 1042 men killed, 62 officers and 1257 men severely wounded, 123 officers and 4671 men slightly wounded, 81 officers and 2994 men gassed. Of the gassed there were 17 deaths and 1204 men were evacuated. Exact figures cannot be given on the missing, for search is being made for all in this class and the number is decreasing daily.

The twenty-second division to reach France, it stands tenth in the amount of artillery captured, thirteenth in number of machine guns captured, and the fourteenth in both prisoners captured and total advance. The division received four official commendations for its individual work in the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne operations. The 90th won its place in the Army of Occupation by never failing to accomplish a mission and by never giving up a foot of ground to the enemy.

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